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"Not So Fast on Fast Track"

In the next few weeks, Congress will decide if we should give President Clinton fast track trade authority until 2001. As the name suggests, fast track would limit the amount of time Congress can take to review a trade agreement to only ninety days and would require a straight up or down vote on the agreement. Fast track authority strips Congress of their constitutional responsibility of amending the agreement. The last time fast track procedures were used to pass major bilateral trade legislation, we ended up with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). While I was not in Congress when NAFTA was approved, I believe we should study its impact on the economy very carefully before expanding NAFTA or rushing into any new trade agreements.

Before NAFTA, Mexico was our only major trading partner with whom the U.S. had a trade surplus. Our chief trade negotiator estimated this surplus would grow from \$1.3 billion a year without NAFTA, to \$9 billion dollar a year once NAFTA was in place. In addition, because of the increase in the trade surplus, he estimated that 200,000 new jobs would be created here. Unfortunately, for American businesses and workers, this prediction was devastatingly inaccurate. Since NAFTA, that surplus has turned into an enormous deficit. In 1995, our trade deficit with Mexico was \$15 billion, in 1996 it was \$16.3 billion, and the data as of the end of August puts us on track reach a \$17 billion trade deficit by the end of 1997.

This exploding trade deficit is even worse when the Census Bureau data on what we are exporting to Mexico, is taken into account. Our exports to Mexico are largely unfinished consumer goods which are assembled in plants just across the border in Mexico called "maquiladoras." Once the products are assembled they are sent back to the U.S. for sale. Prior to NAFTA, much of the final assembly work was done in the U.S., but it is now done in Mexico because of NAFTA. In 1996, 89% of the goods "exported" to Mexico were unfinished consumer goods that, pre-NAFTA, were finished in the U.S. In other words, "Made in America" meant the whole product was made in America. Now, odds are - - it's not. That means job loss for our hard working men and women.

Since NAFTA was implemented, employment in the maquiladoras has increased by over 215,000 jobs. Meanwhile, in the U.S., the Economic Policy Institute estimates that over 600,000 jobs have been lost that can be directly related to NAFTA. The primary reason American jobs are moving to Mexico is directly tied to wages. In Mexico, the average maquiladora plant pays just five dollars a day. American workers are the most competitive workers in the world, but we cannot and should not be forced to compete against businesses that pay subhuman wages. We also must address the issue of global labor standards. We must understand that the global market will, over time, determine those labor standards. And the question becomes, do we want those standards to be raised towards our standards, or do we want those global standards to reflect third world countries.

The broken promises of NAFTA can be seen in light of the adverse impact it has had on Florida

citrus and tomato growers. Despite guarantees of increased exports for citrus growers, today, almost four years after NAFTA, not one Florida orange or grapefruit has been exported to Mexico. NAFTA has also devastated tomato growers throughout the state because Mexico has dumped millions of tomatoes on the U.S. market. Frequently, these tomatoes do not even meet our pesticide safety standards. The Florida Tomato Exchange estimates upwards of 10,000 jobs have been lost due to NAFTA as growers have gone out of business and packing plants have closed.

I am a firm believer in learning from past experiences, and what I have learned from NAFTA is that Congress needs to play more of a role, not less, in determining U.S. trade policy. Many will argue fast track is wrong on the merits of labor and environmental standards. While I agree these are important factors, this debate is about much more. It's about American job creation, not job loss. It's about fair and balanced trade, not just free trade for the sake of free trade. We must examine any new trade agreement in the context of how it will impact jobs and small businesses in our communities. Because of the problems we have already encountered in NAFTA, I will be working to ensure that any trade agreements we enter into provide a level playing field for American businesses and workers. That is the very least we owe the American people.